



NEWS

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**HELPING PEOPLE HELP BIRDS IS THEME
OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY ON MAY 10**

Much has improved in the 35 years since former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Rachel Carson awakened America to the problem of pesticides with her book *Silent Spring*. The Nation's air and water are cleaner. Harmful chemicals such as DDT have been banned and the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and other species have rebounded as a result.

But unfortunately, many of the Nation's 800 migratory bird species are still in peril because of loss of habitat and misuse of common pesticides that can be found at any hardware store. Populations of some species are declining as fast as 2 percent to 4 percent per year.

"Join the Flock . . . Be Part of the Solution" is the theme of the fifth annual International Migratory Bird Day to be observed this year on Saturday, May 10. IMBD is a celebration of spring migration and the return of millions of birds to their nesting areas. IMBD features bird walks, family activities, bird banding demonstrations, and other events throughout the United States and the Western Hemisphere. These events will be held at many national wildlife refuges, city and state parks, national forests, national parks, National Audubon sanctuaries and other nature reserves.

"People will have an opportunity not only to enjoy watching and photographing wild birds but also to learn what they can do to conserve them," said Service Acting Director John Rogers.

"Average citizens can play an important role in stopping the decline of some bird populations," Rogers said. "Something as simple as learning the appropriate time and way to apply pesticides to your lawn or garden can make a big difference. Many people are inadvertently poisoning birds by misusing these chemicals or applying them when birds are especially vulnerable, such as when they are nesting."

The deaths of 20,000 Swainson's hawks in Argentina last year highlighted the problem of pesticides killing birds. The Service, working with the Argentine government, received a commitment from a major chemical company, Ciba-Geigy, to limit use of the pesticide responsible for the deaths and to expand education and training efforts among Argentine farmers.

Pesticides are still a domestic concern. Every year, 4 million tons of pesticides are applied across the United States everywhere from farm fields to homes and gardens. In addition, well over 100,000 tons of pesticides no longer permitted to be used in the United States are shipped to developing countries where migratory birds spend the winter.

Loss and fragmentation of habitat also is a major reason for the decline of many bird species. For example, the United States has lost more than half its wetlands, nearly all its tallgrass prairie and virgin forest, and 75 percent of its shortgrass prairie. Similar destruction and degradation of native habitat is ongoing in many other countries along migration routes.

Last year on International Migratory Bird Day, the Service unveiled a national strategy to better conserve bird habitat by coordinating conservation efforts at the local, state, and national levels. The plan was developed by Partners in Flight, a partnership of 16 Federal agencies, 60 state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies, and more than 100 businesses and conservation organizations.

Under the strategy, dubbed the "Flight Plan," teams of biologists are identifying and ranking bird species most in need of conservation and then setting population and habitat objectives for each species. They are also designating geographic areas critical to birds and developing a conservation blueprint for each species.

By the end of 1998, the Service and its partners expect to complete 50 regional conservation plans. These plans will help landowners who voluntarily conserve birds coordinate their efforts with their neighbors.

"Regardless of much or how little property they own, landowners can become part of a larger voluntary effort to conserve birds," Rogers said. "They can get together with a local bird or garden club, or coordinate land management or landscaping activities with neighbors and nearby parks or refuges. By combining our efforts, we can help ensure future generations will not have to face a silent spring."

Migratory bird conservation also has significant benefits for the economy, Rogers said. The 65 million adults who watch birds spend up to \$9 billion a year on everything from bird seed to birding trips, according to a 1995 study commissioned by the Service.

One of the easiest and most effective things Americans can do for birds is to purchase a Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the "Duck Stamp," available for \$15 from post

offices and national wildlife refuges around the country. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar raised by Duck Stamp sales is used to buy wetland habitat, which benefits migratory waterfowl and a host of other species of birds and wildlife.

"Our birds are not only a priceless treasure enjoyed by old and young alike but they are also significant to our economy, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs," Rogers said.

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